

New Theater To Employ 30

TRIB D NOV 3 1933

Seventeen usherettes, clad in smart semi-military uniforms, will be among the thirty employees of the new Central Theater, which opens tomorrow at Fourteenth Street and Broadway in quarters formerly occupied by the Century and the old Ye Liberty.

M. G. Keller, district manager of the Golden State Theater Com- which is directing the Central, said that



the usherettes will wear maroon coats, with tan trousers.

"We will strictly adhere to the policy that courtesy and service go hand in hand," Keller said. "We comply heartily with the NRA."

Free parking facilities are offered to patrons after 5 p. m., according to Keller. This service is available through an arrangement with the Downtown Merchants Association.

NOTED OAKLAND PLAYHOUSE TO BE REOPENED

TRIB D NOV 3 1939

Remodeling of Century Re- calls Many Notables Who Once Trod Boards There

Re-named the Central Theater, and remodeled throughout at a cost exceeding \$85,000, the Century Theater, Fourteenth Street and Broadway, one of the oldest of Eastbay playhouses, will open tomorrow morning under the management of the United Theatres of California, Inc., according to announcement today by R. A. McNeil, vice-president of the amusement firm.

As Ye Liberty, the new Central theater was known to theater-goers of the Eastbay during the past generation.

Among the famous folk who have trod its stage, which was the largest in the Eastbay, were Frank Bacon, Jimmy Gleason, Willard Mack, Marjorie Rambeau and George Friend.

"We are celebrating our opening with a double program," McNeil said. "Prior to the opening of the doors tomorrow, which will give Oakland its first glimpse of what we believe is one of the city's most beautiful theaters our district managers will parade through the business district in an automobile caravan.

"As a feature of the opening day, we will present two present radio stars, who played at the Central in the old days. They are Henry Schumer and George Webster."

Schumer and Webster will be introduced by Carleton Bryan, president of the Downtown Merchant's Association, McNeil said.

Other speaker will include R. M. Ford, manager of the Central, who served as manager of the Broadway, and McNeil himself.

The opening bill will offer two first-run feature pictures, titled "By Appointment Only" and "The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi" and a Silly Symphony cartoon. Popular prices will prevail, McNeil said.

"The entire lower floor of the theater has been raised several feet. The stage also has been raised.

"Fifteen hundred new air-cushioned seats have been installed, all placed according to modern methods.

"Our new screen will be the largest and most modern in Oakland. Our sound equipment and projection equipment are the finest obtainable.

"New circulating air ventilating equipment also has been installed.

Theater Held New Milestone

TRIB D NOV 3 1933

"The opening of the new Central Theater in the Syndicate Building today marks another milestone in the sound development of downtown Oakland," according to H. R. Flaharty, manager of the Syndicate Building.

Flaharty said: "The Golden State Theaters have shown their confidence in Oakland by installing this fine theater at great expense. The lease alone, which runs



H. R. FLAHARTY
for a period of 10 years, involves approximately \$250,000.

The lease was consummated through the efforts of Flaharty.

OLD THEATER IN NEW DRESS

TRIB D OCT 9 - 1933

Remodeled so completely that it will be an entirely new playhouse, the old Century Theater in the Syndicate Building, Broadway near Fourteenth Street, will open about November 1, it was announced today.

Oakland's newest downtown theater will be known as The Central. This name was chosen because the theater is situated in the heart of Oakland's business and shopping center, according to officials of the Golden State Theater Circuit, Inc. The Central in Oakland will be the latest and one of the finest theaters in the Golden State circuit, which now includes more than 60 motion picture playhouses in California. Ralph Ford, manager and part owner of the Broadway Theater in Oakland, is also part owner of the Central, and will be manager of the new house.

More than \$75,000 is being spent in rebuilding the old playhouse, which was famous a generation ago as Ye Liberty Theater. It was operated successfully for years as a motion picture theater because of its central location, despite the old-fashioned auditorium sloping toward the stage and other antiquated features.

The sloping floors have all been torn up. The many flights of stairs in the outer lobby have been removed and will be replaced by one longer stairway, sloping gradually to the inside foyer.

End of Local Theater Is Also End of Dream

TR 5C FEB 14 1969 BY FRED BRAUE

The theater which in 1904 was the pride of the theatrical world will soon be no more.

It will disappear into the mists of memory when workmen tear down the Central Theater, on Broadway near 14th, to make way for a parking lot.

The theater was the brain child of Harry W. Bishop (Harry Morosco), a talented entrepreneur of 50 years ago. It was christened Ye Liberty Play House and was one of eight theaters catering to Eastbay drama lovers.

THE OPENING

Excitement ran high on March 14, 1904, when 1,500 persons awaited the moment when Ye Liberty's curtain would rise for the first time on James Neill and Edythe Chapman in "A Bachelor's Romance."

This was the great social event of the season. The lobby was a solid mass of flowers. The play was exciting and the actors excellent. This, the first-nighters proclaimed as they awaited their 11:40 carriages, was theater at its best.

And well they might have thought so, for Harry Bishop that night had offered an innovation which was to startle show business.

Bishop was irked by the time, labor and expense involved in changing scenes. "Why," he asked himself, "not build a revolving stage? Then two, three, four or even five sets could be placed before the audience merely by turning the stage!"

It was a revolutionary idea, and one that was to be copied throughout the nation.

But Bishop did not profit from his idea. Money meant little to him. He plowed profits back into new productions with a prodigal hand.

He gave the public great entertainment, but in the end he was to lose Ye Liberty Play House. He was also, later, to lose the Bishop Play House (afterward re-named the Fulton Theater and Franklin Theater), which also had a revolving stage.

END OF THE LINE

Bishop was to die a heart-

reminisced, "was quite extraordinary."

Ye Liberty Theater in 1904 was an extraordinary amusement palace, relatively as pretentious as the rococo movie palaces which were to spring up in New York 30 years later.

To assure visibility, the orchestra section was steeply pitched—so much so that it was said if a patron tripped at the entrance, he would inevitably roll into the orchestra before he could be rescued. Indeed, after an evening's work, the girl ushers complained they had not offered their services for mountain climbing.

But the important fact was that every seat was a good seat. This was as Bishop wanted it.

THE STAGE

The stage was (and is) a wonderful thing. It is 96 feet wide and 90 feet deep. The revolving stage was (and is) an amazing 75 feet in diameter. Dressing rooms, now bare and dusty, line the stage, two tiers on each side.

At the rear, and 30 feet above the stage, is the scenic loft in which scenery was built. This was in itself an enterprise. Canvas was placed on a 30 by 54-foot frame (still in the theater) which was dropped to stage level. As it was raised, scenic artists created the backdrop by working from the top down.

In the 14 years before Bishop lost his theater through bankruptcy, he presented great names—Frank Bacon, Jimmy Gleason (Jimmy married Lucille at a little church at 13th and Clay), Walter Catlett, David Warfield, Landers Stevens, Marjorie Rambeau, Nance O'Neill, Willard Mack, Otis Skinner and many another—not to overlook Richard Hotaling.

PARADOX

Hotaling was a paradox—a rich actor. He was also an amateur actor. His portrayal of Tinker, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," in which he was floated above the stage at the end of a wire, may have lacked authenticity.

In any event, a zany stage

night Ye Liberty opened, recalls that the staff consisted of 12 musicians, two stagehands, an electrician, a flyman, a carpenter and assistant, a scenic painter and assistant, a property man and assistant, 12 girl ushers, two cashiers, a publicity man, the manager and two assistants, three doormen and three janitors—a total of 46 persons.

"Some of the shows had a cast of 100," Du Frane recalls. "The show people were nice people, and we had good clean audiences. They'd be so enthusiastic, we'd give them five or six curtains. Shows were for one week, although an exceptional show might be

Continued Page B-21, Col. 1

a revolving stage.

END OF THE LINE

Bishop was to die a heart-broken man in 1928.

At the end he was virtually penniless and, sadly, his creative qualities never received the recognition they deserved.

Creative?

Bishop decades ago invented the now widely-heralded smellies. There is a scene in Augustus Thomas' "The Witching Hour" in which an old wife, communing with the ghost of a beloved sweetheart, read these lines as the wraith appeared: "... the air is filled, that she passes through, with a subtle, sad perfume. The delicate odor of mignonette, the ghost of a dead-and-gone bouquet."

As the lines were read, an odor of mignonette faintly pervaded the theater.

"The effect," Tribune drama critic, the late Wood Soanes,

was floated above the stage at the end of a wire, may have lacked authenticity.

In any event, a zany stage crew had an inspired moment. It hoisted the actor high above the stage, fastened the wire and walked away.

It was - avely reported that Lotling's excited pleas, growing increasingly loud, had the audience in convulsions.

The plays presented by Ye Liberty's stock company were memorable. There was the "Man on the Box," "Charlie's Aunt," "The Man from Mexico," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "The Girl of the Golden West," "45 Minutes from Broadway," and almost every other hit of the day.

The theater 50 years ago was an important business in the community. Capacity audiences were the rule.

William Du Frane, who was assistant carpenter on the

Is Also the End of a Dream

Continued from Page 20-B

held over for another week."

But the living theater was to lose its preeminence with the advent of the nickelodeon and "the movies."

Ye Liberty became the Century, and, for a time, offered plays. Then in 1933 it was renovated at a cost of \$85,000 to become a movie palace under the name Central Theater. At that time the stage was raised four feet and the seats of the lower floor were also raised, so groping patrons would not roll like oranges down the aisles.

Now its end is near. Demolition is expected to start within the next few weeks.

Hundreds of thousands of persons have been entertained within its walls. The ghosts of a thousand players roam the dusty dressing rooms.

In the doomed theater tears were shed, and voices raised in laughter as long-gone generations were stirred by the artists on the vast stage.

This is the end of Harry Bishop's dream. It may not, for him, have been a profitable dream, but it was a good dream.

Curtain Coming Down for Theater

IRF FEB 3 - 1960

The curtain will ring down for the last time at the Central Theater — now a motion picture house but once one of Oakland's foremost legitimate theaters — within the next three months.

The 1,500-seat auditorium will be ripped down and replaced with a parking lot. Five stores fronting on Franklin St. also will be torn down for the same \$90,000 project.

Henry Trevor, San Francisco real estate man and agent for the owners of the theater and other buildings, announced yesterday that the auditorium and store buildings will be demolished to make way for a 100-car, semi-private parking lot.

LOBBY TO STORE

Only the lobby of the Central Theater, fronting at 1424 Broadway, will remain standing. It will be converted into a store, according to Trevor.

The theater opened as Ye Liberty Playhouse in 1904, with Harry W. Bishop as manager. The first of the scores of legitimate theater productions on its stage was "A Bachelor's Romance."

During the next 29 years some of the American theater's top shows and foremost stars graced the Liberty's stage. Among the productions were "A Midsummer's Night Dream," George M. Cohan's "Forty-five Minutes from Broadway," "The Girl of the Golden West," and "Charlie's Aunt."

Some of the big stars who

took the stage at the Liberty included Jimmy Gleason, Otis Skinner, Frank Bacon, Marjorie Rambeau, and George Friend.

In 1933 the theater was converted for the exclusive showing of motion pictures and was re-named the Central Theater. The event was marked by a parade down Broadway.

The Central has remained a motion picture theater since that time. It is now operated by United-California Theaters, Inc.

REVOLVING STAGE

A spokesman for the theater chain said no official notice of lease termination has been given, but that the move "has been expected for some time."

The theater contains one of the first revolving stages installed in this country. It still is one of the largest stages in the nation.

Twenty-one persons are employed at the theater, which is managed by Dick Scott. No closing date has been set.

The new parking lot will front on Franklin St. Termination notices already have been sent to lessors of the stores on Franklin.

They are the California Coin Shop at 1315 Franklin; Peck's Cocktail Lounge at 1417 Franklin; Dr. Jonas Herman, optometrist at 1425 Franklin; the California Hearing Aid Center, 1429 Franklin; and the Chat and Chew Cafe at 1433 Franklin.

Progress Razes Civic Landmark

TR 5C FEB 12 1961

By ELINOR HAYES

The 56-year-old Central Theater in downtown Oakland is being demolished for a parking lot.

And, on nights when the moon is full and the parking lot is not, ghosts of the Bishop Players may gather for hilarious ball games just as the actors did when it was Ye Liberty Playhouse at the turn of the century.

Then, the players played ball in an adjoining vacant lot when they weren't on stage. Jimmie Gleason, who went on to become a famous stage and screen star, once knocked a fly ball through a window of a photo studio across the street.

Gleason later was wealthy but in those days he couldn't afford \$5 to replace the window. History has it he ran into the theater and donned a concealing costume.

Or Elsa Maxwell should give a party to mark the demise of the truly famous landmark.

and letting him hang there until his excited pleas in increasingly loud tones had the audience rocking with laughter.

Gleason was a young comedian and Lucille Webster was playing character roles when they were married in Oakland in 1906.

MET IN STOCK

They met when both were members of Bishop's two stock companies, whose 40 actors and actresses alternated stock productions at Oakland's Ye Liberty Theater and San Francisco's Majestic.

Thirty years later some of the wedding guests joined with 300 celebrities of film-dom as the Gleasons' guests at a Hollywood anniversary party.

The Oakland theater was pioneer to the Theater Guild and Civic Light Opera Association. It was famous for its revolving stage and its dramas which varied from Shaw to George Ade and its stars from David Warfield to Otis

spoke on the drama.

In 1933 the landmark—then the Century Theater—became the Central Theater, a motion picture house, with \$85,000 spent remodeling it into a carpeted, painted palace of elegance.

It was boasted that the steep pitch of the floor was gone as was the "Squawking" heard in the movie theaters of former days. And the screen was 26 feet wide. Today's wide screens are 60 feet.

A street parade, fireworks and Kleig lights celebrated the

opening. The opening bill pictures were "By Appointment Only" and "The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi."

But some of the pranksters must have been left behind.

Because some years later an 18-year-old girl opened the door of her home and stared straight into the brutally smiling face of a huge gorilla.

She screamed . . . and screamed . . . and screamed!

When her screams died, it was learned the gorilla was a stuffed version some one had stolen from the theater store-

room to chill her blood. Someone forever unknown.

Now the auditorium and stage of the place of lights and laughter are being demolished to make way for a parking lot on Franklin St.

The auditorium and stage extend from Broadway to Franklin through the center of the block between 14th and 15th Streets.

The final curtain came down last year . . .

But maybe some of the ghosts were outside playing baseball at the time.

PATRONIZE YOUR LOCAL BEAUTY SALON DURING

With good reason.

The rotund and exuberant Miss Maxwell had the role of Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" at Ye Liberty Playhouse during Christmas week of 1906.

Even in those days she showed an inclination for organizing things which was to lead to international status as a party giver and celebrity.

The old theater—first Ye Liberty, then Century and later Central—was famous for a host of actors who went on to stardom and lights or left the profession to excel in other endeavors.

YOUNG AT HEART

But the theater and its men and women were young and gay.

Once Richard Hotaling, millionaire amateur actor, was playing Tinker in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Oakland theater. In the play he was swung through the air by a wire attached to his costume.

One night the stage crew added their bit to Shakespeare's burlesque by hoisting Hotaling high above the stage

Skinner.

When it opened March 14, 1904, James Neill and Edythe Chapman starred in "A Bachelor's Romance" but even more notable were Oakland Mayor Warren Olney, who dedicated the house, and University of California President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, who